

# **Changes in American Family Life: Types, Causes, and Consequences**

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## **Types and magnitude of family change:**

- **Divorce: up 250 percent between 1940 and 1989, up 30 percent since 1970.**
- **Marriages: down 40 percent since 1970.**
- **Non-marital cohabitation: 1.6 million cohabiting couples in 1980, 4.5 million in 1999.**
- **Fertility: 3.7 lifetime births per American woman in 1955-59, 1.8 births in 1980-84, 2.0 births in 2001-2003. Poor-rich fertility disproportionate.**
- **Out-of-wedlock births: 5 percent of all births in 1960, 34 percent in 2002.**
- **Employment of married women and mothers: 17 percent of married women in 1940, 60.9 percent in 2004 (down slightly from 62.0 percent in 2000); 20 percent of married women with children under age of six in 1960, 59.3 percent of married women with children under age of six in 2004 (down from 63.5 percent in 1995).**

## **Causes**

- **Loss of home-based family economy (cf. Pitirim Sorokin's fears that home was becoming a "mere incidental parking place").**
- **Shifts in public and economic policies (away from tax protection for families with young children and away from family wage).**
- **Erosion of religious faith, especially in "the public square" (cf. Richard John Neuhaus's *The Naked Public Square*).**
- **Sexual revolution, pornography, the Pill, and legal abortion (the end of shotgun weddings).**
- **Feminist, New Left, environmentalist, and homosexual movements (cf. post-Renaissance secular utopian precedents—"spilt religion" of intellectuals).**

## **Consequences**

- **Crime (cf., e.g., David Courtwright's *Violent Land*).**
- **Abuse (cf., e.g., David Finkelhor et al. for children; Jan Stets for spouses).**
- **Physical illness (cf. 2003 report of the American Academy of Pediatrics).**
- **Psychological disorders (cf., e.g., Andrew Cherlin's twin-pair research).**
- **Suicide (cf., e.g., research on suicidal behavior by Judith Rubenstein et al.).**
- **Shortened life (cf., e.g., Yuaureng Hu and Noreen Goldman).**
- **Academic failure (cf., e.g., Gary Sandefur, Sara McLanahan, and Roger Wojtkiewicz for family structure; and Wendy Goldberg, Ellen Greenberger, and Stacy Nagel for maternal employment).**
- **Poverty (cf., e.g., David T. Ellwood).**
- **New political/economic problems (cf. Ben Wattenberg's *The Birth Dearth*).**
- **Erosion of civic life (cf., e.g., Corey L.M. Keyes).**